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OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #1941/01 1250625

ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 050625Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0857
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001941

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS, DRL/CRA, DRL/IL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINS SENV RP
SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST SLAIN

REF: A. 05 MANILA 5097

1B. MANILA 1937
1C. MANILA 1452

11. (SBU) Summary: In early April, two environmental activists in Cebu received word that an explosives dealer allegedly had placed a bounty on their heads. Days later, one of the activists was murdered. The other, Antonio "Tony" Oposa, Jr., continues to fear for his life. Mission is taking every opportunity -- including at the Cabinet level -- to express concern for Oposa's safety while simultaneously urging the GRP to take action on the case of his slain colleague and other cases of extrajudicial killings. End Summary.

In Cold Blood

12. (U) In early April, two environmental activists in Cebu received a tip-off that an explosives dealer had allegedly placed a bounty on their heads. On April 12, a gunman shot and killed Elpidio "JoJo" de la Victoria as he exited his home in Talisay City, Cebu. Six witnesses identified a Talisay City police officer as the trigger man. Police then arrested the officer, who remains in custody. Prosecutors filed a charge of murder against him on April 19 in the Regional Trial Court of Talisay City, which has not yet set an arraignment date but denied bail. De la Victoria's colleague, Antonio "Tony" Oposa, Jr., remains under threat and has gone into hiding.

Extreme Activism

13. (U) Oposa and de la Victoria had been working closely together to protect the Visayan Sea, an ecologically-diverse marine area situated at the heart of the Philippine archipelago. Oposa is the founder of the Law of Nature Foundation (LNF) -- which has worked with USAID in the past -- and both men were team leaders of "Visayan Sea Squadrons," which serve as the action arm of the group. De la Victoria also served as a Cebu City Commissioner and was the administrator of the local fish market, where he reportedly refused to allow the sale of seafood harvested by dynamite fishing.

14. (SBU) In an April 26 meeting with poloff, Oposa explained that he and his colleagues used various (and sometimes extreme) methods to promote the protection of the Visayan Sea. In addition to public education and the filing of

lawsuits against those fishing illegally, he said that that he and de la Victoria had conducted at least three separate raids on a dealer/manufacturer of dynamite used in illegal fishing, whom he described as the mastermind behind de la Victoria's slaying. He also claimed that this individual had sold explosives to members of terrorist organizations, including the late Fathur Al-Ghozi of the group Jemaah Islamiyah (ref A).

USG Concern

¶ 15. (SBU) Mission has voiced concern to a range of GRP officials, including during the Ambassador's May 4 meetings with Secretary of Interior and Local Government Ronaldo Puno (ref b) and Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources Angelo Reyes (septel). Officials of both Departments said that Oposa is now receiving protection, which Oposa confirmed to poloff. Embassy's Regional Security Office is in contact with the Cebu police force regarding the de la Victoria slaying. Poloff will travel to Cebu later in May to meet with the local police task force.

Comment

¶ 16. (SBU) Mission's concerns over extrajudicial killings include this killing but also focus on the tragically numerous cases involving leftists, journalists, judges, and others. We will continue to raise this issue with the full spectrum of GRP officials, ranging from the Cabinet level to the PNP Task Force level and to the municipal and provincial levels. Our annual human rights report documents more

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extensively these threats to the rule of law and violations of human rights.

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